

Thorton Chase - Before Abraham Was I am

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To _____

Your letter, expressing your wish to know more of the relations of the "New Teachings" to those of Christ, was duly received.

It is not well to feel discouragement or disappointment when a sincere soul is seeking the Light, and yet does not grasp its wonderful presence rapidly. We have seen too many who have "accepted" all, with little or no hesitation, and then, when the first winds of testing blew, "faith" proved to be of shallow depth and passivity proved more attractive than endurance. "Hasten slowly" is a good motto.

Some seem to be truly prepared and waiting for this Truth and it comes to them as satisfactorily as water to a thirsty traveler, but even in those cases, there is required a process of growth through trials and tests of the most severe kind. The seed may fall into rich and deep soil and begin to grow immediately and perhaps rapidly, but the full tree is not sown, only the seed. It must be nourished, cared for, cultivated, and tried by difficulties that it may become strongly rooted and thus grow into a tree fitted to stand all winds of opposition. This Truth offers the wonderful opportunities of a Spiritual Dawn in which all things are become new and are presented in newly charming dress, but the truths themselves are as old as eternity and have been told to God's creatures throughout their existence, in such guise as the varying <p2> conditions of the people, from time to time, permitted them to comprehend. But no more now than then is any "royal road" to Paradise offered. The path is strewn and hedged with thorns, although sweet roses bloom above them. The way is one of testing, trial and "fire" that "searches the reins" and tears away from us one beloved stronghold after another, until the very essence of the creature realizes its utter helplessness, its nakedness, its need in the presence of its Maker. It must come to realize that every birth is through death, and that the spiritual birth can only be through the death of the natural self-desires. This Truth has been forever taught, and ever misinterpreted, thus leading to asceticism, seclusion, self-punishment - the professions of cowardice, rather than to heroic battling with the actual self in the arena of the world, with the self of animal and ignoble tendencies - the spirit of this world.

But, even during this contest for Life, there shines before us the glorious prize of that magnificent and inexpressible destiny which God has made possible for us. (Do not mistake this for fatalism; it has not a tinge of it.) It is the very essence of the teachings of our Lord Jesus, but it seems to have been strangely clouded by the darkness of the doctrines of fear which have for so

long held sway in the Christian (?) churches. We look forward and upward to the "prize that is set before us" with longing eyes, having the "evidence of things not seen," with certainty of attainment by God's help - IF WE WILL - and our hearts are melted in gratitude and praise to the Generous One, the Giver, for His great mercy toward us in offering and making possible such exultation and joy. It is the old story of <p3> looking forward to the goal and striving for it through all vicissitudes, trials or hindrances. If need be, we will forsake all to follow Him.

I will take up one portion of your kind letter, which seems to me distinctive and natural, and try to throw a little light upon it. I quote from you: "The same hard question is in my way. I have thought so long of my Master in the Father's Mansions, I fear to, as it seems to me, transfer my affections to this other Master, who to you is the same come again."

Yes! There is the very essence of loyalty and difficulty to a nature such as I conceive yours to be. The loyal soul fears ever an apparent temptation to disloyalty. To us, however, the word and work, the personality and mission of Jesus, the Christ, become clarified, glorified and made more precious through the light thrown upon them by the knowledge of this Manifestation. Knowledge of Him has increased our love of Jesus.

In all times the tendency of the world has been toward a cognition and esteem for the outward rather than the inward. We judge people by their garments and their acquaintance with etiquette and the several politenesses of the time. We are such slaves to our senses that we invariably demand first their satisfaction. The first question asked concerning a prophet is, "What miracles does he work?" The natural desire is for novelty, and this is supplemented by a natural idea that a Messenger of God can work "miracles," and therefore ought to do so to prove his claim. Man wishes and actually demands of God that He shall prove Himself to man according to the latter's method. <p4> There seems to be a wish to be convinced by that which he believes in fact can not be, to be overwhelmed by evident, compulsory and incontrovertible proof, and then, he thinks, he will "believe" and "be saved" when the conditions shall be such that it shall be impossible for him to disbelieve. Yet we find that, according to the Record, few people obtained any lasting belief through witnessing the reported miracles of Christ. When but a little testing came, those who had professed belief on account of miracles, fell away and walked no more with Him.

It is a fact that today the claimed foundation of the Christian Religion, and the cause for which belief is demanded, is the miracles of Christ, and especially those which tend the most to confound the intellect and challenge the reasoning powers of men. (I do not deny the miracles; I cannot assent to a literal interpretation of all of those reported; but, if performed, they were, at best, but a secondary, not a primary proof of Christ's authority.) If a man believes because of what are called miracles, his belief is compelled, forced. His reason is practically dethroned, his judgement unbalanced and his free-will destroyed. The greatest gift of God to man in his present condition is FREE-WILL, the power of freely choosing what he wills to choose. God will

surely never interfere with that gift of His to man, because, the instant that its action is forcibly affected, it is destroyed, and man ceases to be a man and becomes only an animal, a machine. It is probably true that every great prophet and representative of God on earth has performed unusual and miraculous works, but, if so, they had a deeper purpose than to be merely a foundation of belief (although they might serve in that direction by <p5> inculcating the beginning of wisdom, which is the fear of God in him who could not be started on the path otherwise on account of his hardness of heart), and such miracles were only the outward garment of "inner significances" in which the real teaching lay.

The GREAT MIRACLE, the primary proof of the Divine authority and Mission of Christ, was the Word that He spoke! He was the incarnated WORD.

[1] "Down there, in the streets of that city of Jerusalem, walked a poor man, who had no place to lay His Head. His clothing was neat but very plain and poor, especially so when compared with the silken robes and broad phylacteries of the dignified priests of the Temple. He was uneducated, this foot-traveler; none of the Doctors of the Law had ever had him for a pupil.¹ He came from that despised mountain country of the Nazarenes. He was the son of a carpenter. His few followers were, like himself, poor, illiterate laborers, fishermen from the shores of Galilee.² He was despised, rejected, spurned; ridiculed as "gluttonous and a wind bibber;"³ "possessed of a devil;" a mad man holding forth to the people in the streets.(4) "Indeed such an one should be confined and not permitted, even in his insanity, to blaspheme and announce himself as the 'Son of God,' and especially so now, as, at this very time, according to the prophecies, the 'Messiah' should come to redeem Israel, to overcome the Roman rule and conquer all nations and bring them beneath the feet of the triumphant 'chosen people of God,' the Jews. Messiah will come in might and power and majesty, with legions of <p6> the hosts of heaven, with lightnings and thunderings; the sun will be darkened, the moon turned to blood, the stars fall to earth, the old earth and heaven will pass away and a new heaven and new earth be created; and, over all, with Him at the head, shall the House of Judah and Levi reign.[2] What a glorious prospect - and the time is ripe! Where is He? Surely He will come, and his hosts with Him! But what audacity, what blasphemy, that this poverty-stricken wretch, with not a sword to back him-to say nothing of angels- should openly declare himself to be 'the Christ, the Son of God!'" So thought and spoke the great and learned priests of the Jews, the "chosen people," but - HE NEVER CAME, THAT "MESSIAH!"

(1) John VII:15 (2) Matt. IV:18 (3) Matt. XI:19 (4) John X:20

[1 This description is according to the apparent teachings of the Record, and the views of the Jewish authorities of that time.]

[2 Joel 11:10,11]

Alas for the pride and short-sightedness of man! The WORD which that One spoke caused the fisherman to leave his livelihood and follow Him who seemed poorer than himself; caused the troubled, the oppressed, the sick unto death, to cling to Him; caused the learned and the great to be confounded; caused the powerful

priests of the great Temple to tremble, and finally to clamor vehemently for His life; caused the ignominious condemnation and the glorious death; caused the sacrifices of broken hearts (acceptable unto God) and the martyrdoms of the faithful; and it has swept on over a great section of the earth, causing untold millions to look to that WORD, to learn thereby the Way of Life, and to come unto that Life by following, each in his own station, the Way lived before him by that Mighty One.

Was it his reported miraculous birth, his material resurrection, his ascension into the vapory clouds surrounding the earth, his command over wind and waves, and his cures <p7> of illness and of material death that caused all of these wondrous results? I think not. It was the divine power of Life Eternal inherent in the blessed Words that He, as the incarnated WORD of God, spoke from His pure mouth and lived through His pure life. It was the wonder-working power of the Holy Spirit, which dwelt within Him and spoke through Him. It was the invincible might of Divine Love, which poured itself forth for man through Him. It was the triumphant force of the example of patient suffering and sacrifice in the path of God for the sake of humanity. Of himself, he could do nothing, and claimed to do nothing; but the FATHER, who dwelt in Him, worked and spoke through Him that which all the hosts of earth and heaven could not accomplish otherwise.

It seems difficult for us, sensuous creatures, to get away from the individuality. Jesus taught with utmost clearness that his individuality was as nothing, that his person was only as a mouth-piece used by the Father, and that all creatures must look to the Father only. Whenever He spoke of Himself as the One to be believed upon and as the Saviour, it was always in the same sense as when He said to Philip: "He that hath seen Me, hath seen the Father." It is evident that He did not refer to his personal self, his individuality, but to that pure essence, that, clear mirror of his purified and glorified character, in which naught could be seen save the reflection and shining forth of the Father. He had in very truth "overcome the world," and naught of it could be seen in Him. How little they understood Him when he said: "Before Abraham was, I AM!" They could conceive of nothing but the person and not at all the indwelling spirit, which is the REALITY. <p8>

Do not think that I am decrying the personality of Jesus. No! It is sacred, the perfect man, but it is not that personality which is to come again. The "second coming" must bear evident marks of similitude to the first, in manner, character, instruction and in its Spirit, but it must be greater in results, wider in extension and different in effect. "I came not to bring peace, but a sword," said He. The later manifestation said: "The Most Great Peace must come," and he established the laws and provisions for that time of peace, not only for the individual but for the nations; because that second coming must be for the whole world, in order that God shall be ONE and His Name One, and the "the earth shall be filled with the knowledge of the glory of the Lord as the waters cover the sea." (Hab. 2:14. Is. 11:9.)

The second coming reiterates every doctrine of the first coming, but enlarges

and clarifies its meaning until "he who runs may read." The seals, placed upon the books of the prophets, and even upon the words of Christ (He spake only in parables), have been broken and the contents revealed to our happy sight in this blessed day. Indeed He has come again, come in the Kingdom of His Father, the Revealer, come as the Interpreter of that which was and is. Again He lives, subjected to suffering, under oppression, in humility and poverty, but at this time heralding to all nations of mankind the universal Peace, the universal worship of the One God.

We know the mission of Jesus, the Christ, as few if any of His followers in the past have known. We love, acknowledge, and praise Him, as the floods of light now pour over Him. We do not for one moment desert Him, <p9> but we look to Him with praise and thanksgiving; and we hail with joy Him whom God has now sent in this later age to reveal the CHRIST a second time. The loyalist is true, not to James or William or Edward, but to the KING. It is not the personality, but the authority, the station to which he is loyal.

You know that we believe in the Oneness and Singleness of God, and that He manifests Himself through chosen ones from time to time, in various degrees of light and power, as His Great Mercy takes pity upon the needs and conditions of men. Whoever the Manifestor may be, we worship the One God, and we acknowledge the Manifestation, when we witness His evident Signs, the greatest of which is the POWER OF HIS WORD.

We are seeing the days and scenes of the time of Jesus now being repeated, only on a larger scale and with farther reaching and more rapid effects. We are seeing the advance guards of the differing beliefs and nations of the earth coming together from their strongholds of opposition and seclusion into the plain of unity of Religion, and greeting each other with love and the hand of fellowship.

Already, were you going to Persia, Egypt, Russia, India, China, Japan, France, England, Italy, Australia, or the Islands of the Sea, to Mohammedans, Buddhists, Brahmans, Zoroastrians, Confucians, Jews or Christians, I could give you introductions, or even one Word, which would cause you to be greeted with the utmost warmth, kindness and service, by those who, a little while ago, were of such varying faiths. We, here in Chicago, are constantly receiving the most beautiful, spiritual, sincere and loving letters from those scattered peoples, and they are written <p10> by men (and women) who are evidently not lacking in either ethical culture or spiritual knowledge. A net-work of love, friendship and loyalty to the One Cause and the One God and to His Holy manifestations, past and present, a net of spiritual brotherhood and faith, tied with binding knots of sincerity, without regard to nationality, country or previous faith, is being woven around the world. It is the harbinger of that "Most Great Peace."

Not for one moment do we "transfer our affections" from one "Master" to another; but the knowledge of the One that is, increases our love for the One that was, because the present throws light upon the past, and because we know

that in reality there is no is, nor was, but, "Before Abraham was, I AM;" and in "that day," which is known only to the Father, "I will come again" in the glory of the Father. That "coming" is, was, and ever shall be-in the Manifestation, by the Holy Spirit, of the WORD OF GOD to man-through Man.

You know that we believe and acknowledge Baha'u'llah to be the Manifestation of God in this age; that God, the Father, has manifested Himself through Baha'u'llah, and has again revealed His Word, His Commands and Will to man, more completely and to a higher degree than ever before; and that He has ascended and left His Spiritual Kingdom on earth under the guidance of His Son, Abdul-Baha Abbas, "The Master."

Through forty years of persecution and exile Baha'u'llah proclaimed the Will of God by mouth and pen, in words of deep spiritual significance. In all that time Abdul-Baha was his companion, and learned of Him. He is the Centre of the new Covenant, the Fulfiller of the Law, the Exemplar for all men. He lives the Christ-life before our sight. He teaches the Christ doctrines anew to ears that can hear. He interprets the Words of the Father, and calls the seekers of every land to come and drink of the sweet waters of Truth which are "descending in torrents" upon the world. His great and constant claim is simply that of servitude to all the beloved of God, to all the world of those who seek God, desiring self-abnegation in the Cause of God. His declared office is the Servant of God and of man.

A great difficulty, even with earnest hearts, in the time of Jesus, was that they could not abandon Abraham and Moses for that One; but Jesus told them plainly that if they believed in Abraham and in Moses, they would believe in Him; and so, today we say that if one believes in Jesus, the Christ, he will believe in this One, when He becomes known to him. Those Jews did not abandon Moses, who accepted Christ, because they understood that Jesus came not to destroy the law and teachings of Moses, but to fulfil them on a higher and broader scale; and so it is again in the blessed time.

The WORD is the bearer of the seed of eternal life. The vocalizer thereof, or the writer, the revealer thereof, is an instrument in the hands of God. We honor the instrument; we love it as an instrument and as the liver of the Word, the exemplar, the sacrificer of self for humanity, the mouth-piece of God; but is GOD and HIM only that we worship, praise and adore. HE only is the Recipient of our central and real love. We must not allow ourselves to confuse the lantern with the light within it. What we love and cling to in Jesus, is the Character, the Attributes of God manifested in Him, not to the man of such a height, build, weight and appearance. It all finally leads to GOD, only GOD, the Father. We bow down and revere and love His Manifestations, BECAUSE THEY ARE HIS MANIFESTATIONS, not because of their personality. Those who seek spiritual things look unto the "Master's" face and see therein exactly what was perceived in the face of Jesus by those who had seen Him. When He replied to Philip, the disciples understood and asked no more, but only they who were "disciples" received that knowledge.

The Master's personality is attractive and remarkable for the wonderful sweetness and humility manifested therein combined with an indescribable power, dignity and majesty; and these attributes are not those of the natural man but of the Spirit, and it is the indwelling Holy Spirit that makes Him what He is. He is not seen by all who come into His presence, although none escape the consciousness of a wonderful influence ever emanating from Him.

Before His ascension, the Manifestation commanded all to turn their faces toward this one, and those who have sincerely obeyed that command, have found in Him such satisfaction of knowledge and of life, of interpretation and of example, that the advancing souls from all nations gladly bow before Him and acknowledge Him, "The Master."

You say you wish your life to please Him. The way is simple but difficult. It is to learn the Commands of God as much as you can, and to live them. It is to seek the "pearl of great price," the Truth, to abandon all self-desires to attain one thing-THE LOVE OF GOD. The first act and evidence of that love is-obedience. Finding the Truth, receive it gladly, and live it. Not asceticism, <p13> not self-degradation, nor fleeing from earth's activities, but rather-all that which love to God and love to man implies, the cutting of the self from the lower loves of jealousy, envy, greed, and self-desires, and putting on the garments of love, patience, kindness, justice, mercy-the "Characteristics of God!"

But, if it be He Who is manifested in this great Day, it is wise for us to seek, to know and acknowledge Him.

Yours in His Name,
Thornton Chase.